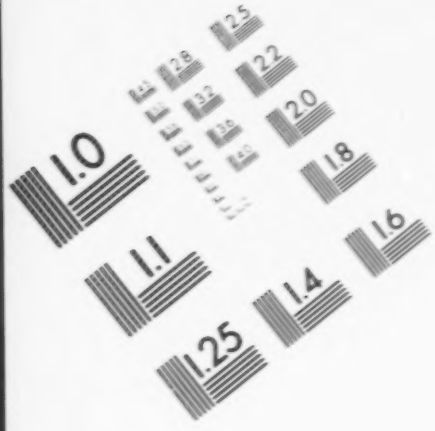

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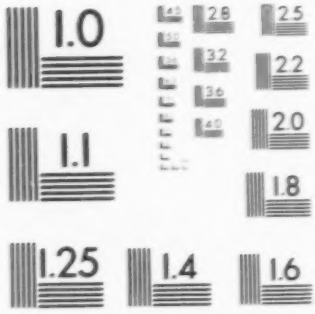

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ABSTRACT

The impact of recent changes in the welfare and work force development systems on adult basic education programs and their students was examined at a literacy education provider in Somerville, Massachusetts. The study found that the Student Coalition for Action in Literacy Education (SCALE) program had previously had no difficulty in attracting and retaining students and in helping students achieve the desired results. Now, however, the new Career Center Initiative and the system of "Individual Referrals" has had the following effects: the number of students in education programs at the agency has plummeted; the agency is having a difficult time recruiting students; programs have been consolidated and are at risk of ending altogether; staff have been laid off; and the stability of a large, long-running community agency has been severely shaken. Income has dropped from $228,000 to $84,500. The situation seems to stem from changes in the welfare and work force development systems, such as the following: (1) the implementation of the 20-hour work requirement for most recipients of public assistance, along with significant restrictions on funding for education; (2) cuts in non-Department of Education funding for basic and prevocational education from sources such as the Job Training Partnership Act; and (3) implementation of the One-Stop Career Center Initiative and the replacement of funding contracts with the Individual Referral process, posing many problems for adult basic education programs and the agencies that operate them. These developments have put a strain, probably unintended, on the agencies. They are now forced to spend large amounts of staff time in marketing and follow-up, and staff are already overextended. In addition, the Career Center design and Individual Referral process more easily serves a middle-class, English-speaking clientele that can more easily visit a number of programs. Finally, communication between the Service Delivery Area and the programs is not always adequate, especially now when it is needed during the implementation of reforms. (KC)

ED 401 403

The Economies of SCALE: Exploring the Impact of Career Centers on ABE Programs

by Steve Reuys

What has been the impact of recent changes in the welfare and workforce development systems on adult basic education programs and their students? The following article looks at how one program, SCALE in Somerville, has been affected this year. We hope this becomes the first in a series of articles in this newsletter examining these issues and presenting what's happening at other local programs. We would like to urge you to write (or talk with us) about how your own program has been affected by recent changes. This article was based on a discussion between the author and five SCALE staff members--Susan Barnard, Susan Lane Riley, Zita Samuels, Betty Stone, and Eileen Strier. Opinions not attributed to them are those of the author. We realize that the issues and concerns raised here may be controversial, and we would be glad to receive and print responses to this article.--Ed.

Until this past summer SCALE in Somerville had a successful record of providing ESOL, ABE, pre-vocational, and vocational education services to students funded through the federal Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA), the state's Department of Public Welfare, Industrial Services Program (ISP), Bay State Skills Corporation, and other funders. According to SCALE staff, they generally had no difficulty in attracting and retaining students, and even under sometimes-restrictive and overly-demanding performance-based contracts, they were very successful in helping their students achieve the desired results. Now, however, the number of students in education programs at SCALE not funded through the state Department of Education has plummeted, the agency is having an unexpectedly difficult time recruiting students, programs have been consolidated and are at risk of ending altogether, staff have been laid off and further layoffs are possible, and the stability of a large, long-running community agency has been severely shaken. How has this happened? There is no single cause and a number of factors seem to be at work, but in various ways SCALE's experience demonstrates what effects the recent

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overhaul of the welfare and workforce development systems is likely to have on many education and multi-service agencies here in Massachusetts and even across the country.

First, some specifics: Until recently, SCALE operated--in addition to its part-time DOE-funded education programs--five full-time vocational and pre-vocational education programs. "Office 2000" is a vocational skills training program for low-income students, formerly funded largely through group contracts from Bay State Skills Corporation and the local SDA, Employment Resources Inc. (ERI). This year, despite aggressive marketing by SCALE, only a very small number of students have enrolled in the program under the new system of "Individual Referrals" (IR's) implemented as part of the new Career Center Initiative. Many of the students in the program used to come from Boston, but this year none are from Boston. SCALE also used to run four pre-vocational education programs: "English for Work," an ESOL program primarily for welfare clients; "Basics First/ESOL," an ESOL program for dislocated workers; "Reaching New Goals," an ABE program for non-high school graduates; and "Basics First/ABE," an ABE program for dislocated workers. These programs were funded through the Department of Welfare (now the Department of Transitional Assistance), JTPA, ISP, and ERI. This past summer, with expectations of declining enrollments due to changes in welfare and cutbacks in pre-vocational funding, these four pre-vocational programs were consolidated into two. Yet even with that reduction and, again, aggressive marketing by staff, they have been unable through "Individual Referrals" to secure decent enrollment for those two programs.

All of this is now "wreaking havoc," according to the supervisor of SCALE. Last year almost $228,000 was received in funding for these pre-employment programs, with roughly $168,000 of this coming in the form of contracts for programs, supplemented by another

$60,000 in Individual Referrals. This year, a total of only $84,500 has been committed in funding thus far—all of it through IR's, and none of it from funding contracts. This represents a 63% cut in funding for these educational programs. Out of a full-time SCALE staff of twenty just a year ago, six teachers have been laid-off so far, with more lay-offs possible. Remaining staff have been forced to fill-in and take on additional responsibilities. Under the IR (individual referral) system, they find there is no effective way for the program to plan or to budget for the coming year. And it's all having harmful effects on students. Again, why is this happening?

Some of the answers are peculiar to SCALE or to the MetroNorth region; others apply throughout the state or throughout the country. Some of the consequences are unintended; others may be quite purposeful. But one way or another, the situation seems to stem from recent changes in the welfare and workforce development systems: 1) The implementation of the 20-hour work requirement for most recipients of public assistance, along with significant restrictions on funding for education through DTA, has resulted in reductions in the number of low-income people able to attend adult basic education programs. 2) Cuts in non-DOE funding for basic and pre-vocational education from such sources as JTPA have reduced opportunities for many students who used to be served through those programs. 3) Implementation of the One-Stop Career Center Initiative and the replacement of funding contracts with the Individual Referral process pose many problems for adult basic education programs and the agencies which operate them, some of them intrinsic to the Career Center/Individual Referral design, others apparently due to difficulties and weaknesses in its implementation.

The Career Center Initiative is an attempt to bring a free-market, competition-based approach to the education and job training arena. Under this system, educational programs are

not granted aggregate funding contracts to run certain types of classes for certain numbers of students. Instead funding is received, one small piece at a time, in the form of "Individual Referrals" from the regional SDA or Career Center as potential students who qualify for funding elect to attend a particular program. However, most agencies run on shoestring budgets and have few or no reserves with which to support programs and their staff while they wait to see whether individual referrals will come their way. In order to provide quality services, educational programs have to be able to do meaningful planning in advance and have to base their plans on a certain "critical mass" of students for each class they intend to offer. Unfortunately, a system that relies on Individual Referrals as a sole source of funding makes it all but impossible for most community-based agencies with shallow financial pockets to do this necessary educational and fiscal planning, and many effective educational programs (and some entire agencies) will inevitably succumb to the instability and unpredictability of such a system. (A non-ABE example of this can be found at the Elizabeth Peabody House in Somerville, which recently had to shut down its training program for day care teachers due to funding problems under this new system.) Thus, while intended to promote quality, this new approach may ironically result in a huge loss of quality programming that is available to students, as more and more programs shut their doors.

In addition, the new system design is very labor-intensive. It requires that programs devote large amounts of their energy both to "marketing" their program and to doing follow-up of prospective clients. In a system that's as traditionally underfunded as adult basic education, there is little on which to build this capacity other than staff who are already over-extended. And finally, there is the question of whether the career center model makes sense for all clients.

SCALE staff wonder whether the career centers aren't really catering more to a middle-class, English-speaking clientele that can, for example, easily visit a number of programs without having to worry about language barriers or problems of transportation and child care.

These are issues that appear to be inherent to the Career Center design. There have also been problems, at least in the case of SCALE, in how the design has been implemented during its first year. The Individual Referral process which has been put in place in their region, MetroNorth, more or less assumes the existence of a functioning Career Center for the region, but no career center will in fact be opening there until later this year. According to SCALE, the IR process in their region takes a minimum of five weeks and can sometimes take months.

Also, different regions appear to be following different policies. While MetroNorth has totally adopted the IR system and is issuing IR's for clients to attend programs outside that region, most other regions, such as Boston, in an effort to mitigate some of the planning and budgeting difficulties for programs discussed earlier, are still providing funding support directly to programs and may not be issuing IR's to students for programs outside their region. In the case of SCALE, this difference in policy has been harmful, with students from MetroNorth SDA communities being able to go elsewhere, but students from other areas not always able to come to SCALE.

Finally, the implementation of such a radically new system calls for truly effective communication between the SDA and all the various programs in the region regarding changes in referral procedures, deadlines, and other requirements. This communication has not always been there. For example, according to their staff, SCALE was not told there was to be an early cut-off date on referrals through a particular funding source until it was too late for many

students to be processed; as a result, SCALE received only one actual IR from this source, when there were many more students eager to participate.

Clearly, many of the effects of the recent reforms were not intentional. To some degree, problems are inevitable when a complicated new policy and process is being implemented. However, it does appear that in this case many of the problems have resulted from insufficient planning at the state and regional levels, insufficient resources to carry out the new policies effectively, and, especially, an inability or unwillingness to consider the impact of the new Career Center process from the perspective of the adult education programs and community-based agencies that are being affected by its implementation. A number of questions should have been asked, and answered: Just what will this process look like in reality, as it is carried out by real people at real programs with real students? What will need to be in place in order for the process to work effectively? What effects will the new process have on the programs that are expected to be there in the field to carry it out? And, in the final analysis, which aspects of all this change are possibly not really in the best interests of the students?

It is also important to realize that some of the effects of this reform are, in fact, intended. Recent policy decisions regarding welfare and funding for education and training have made it clear that the priority of the current state and federal governments—with the important exception of their beleaguered Departments of Education—is to get people who are readily employable into jobs--any jobs--and that there is little interest or commitment to providing other low-income people with the resources and opportunities for long-term basic education. (More on this in an upcoming issue.) Yes, in some ways, the new system isn't working very well, but in other ways,

it may be functioning just as it was intended to. In either case, it is programs such as SCALE that suffer, along with many of the students--and potential students--they were formerly eager and able to serve.

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